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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: 6 November 1958

SUBJECT : Inquiry of Assistant Secretary Kearns,
Department of Commerce, about Possibility
of CIA Commercial Intelligence Support

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Dulles
Assistant Secretary Kearns
Mr. Amory

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1. Mr. Kearns opened the discussion by explaining that the Department of Commerce was anxious to render all possible assistance to the American business community, particularly medium and small business concerns, in the field of foreign trade. He explained that Commerce has been reduced over time in its overseas commercial staff (commercial attaches, etc.) and that its primary support was coming from the Department of State Foreign Service. He complained, however, that a very great share of this type of information experienced such delay in transmittal to Commerce that it was often of little use by the time it arrived. He went on to say that he was aware that the Agency had an economic analysis unit and explained that his visit was to explore the degree to which CIA might be able to help in the job of providing timely unclassified information to Commerce for the use of the American business community.

2. The Director responded by saying that our NSC mandate restricts our activities in economic intelligence rather closely to the Sino Soviet Bloc.. While it was true that we also did a certain amount of work in the peripheral countries outside of the Bloc, this was primarily focused on Soviet Bloc economic and commercial activities in these countries. At this point Mr. Amory added that he had been under the impression that the sort of work Mr. Kearns described was actually being done in the Department of Commerce and that, in fact, he had on many occasions referred people to Commerce for help on commercial affairs in non-Bloc countries!

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3. At Mr. Dulles' invitation to explain a little more fully the nature of the work we are doing vis-a-vis the uncommitted countries, I briefly described our "penetration" work. I also went on to say that in the course of covering these affairs we often came across items which might well be of interest to the Department of Commerce. I explained that probably 70 per cent of our information on Soviet economic activities in these countries came from the public press including, of course, the FBIS summaries and that quite often these tidbits would be unclassified. I also said, however, that we were not able to focus on such items.

4. At this point the Director suggested that Mr. Kearns might be interested in exploring the possibility of closer liaison with the ERA; and Mr. Kearns, thanking him, said that he would probably send one of his people over to ORR to discuss possibilities in greater detail.

5. The whole conversation lasted only 15 or 20 minutes and at its close the Director suggested that Mr. Kearns would probably find the Department of State more helpful with this problem than CIA can be.

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